


HUNGER IN OAKLAND

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# 1. INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF HUNGER IN OAKLAND

## 2. SCOPE AND PURPOSE: A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

Hunger in America has become an unfortunate fact of life. It is a problem that is often overlooked, but one that is becoming increasingly important. This report is a preliminary analysis of the problem of hunger in Oakland, California. It is intended to provide a basis for further study and action.

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The problem of hunger in America is a complex one. It is a problem that is often overlooked, but one that is becoming increasingly important. This report is a preliminary analysis of the problem of hunger in Oakland, California. It is intended to provide a basis for further study and action.

According to the report of the National Academy of Sciences, the number of people in the United States who are hungry has increased from 1950 to 1960. In 1950, there were 10 million people who were hungry, and in 1960, there were 15 million. This is a significant increase, and it is a problem that is becoming increasingly important. This report is a preliminary analysis of the problem of hunger in Oakland, California. It is intended to provide a basis for further study and action.





## I. INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF HUNGER IN OAKLAND

### A. HUNGER AND POVERTY: A FUNDAMENTAL RELATIONSHIP

Hunger in America has become so widespread that it has been called a national epidemic. More than a dozen national studies conducted in the last four years document that acute and chronic food shortages affect millions of American households.<sup>1</sup>

Hunger is defined as the physical and mental state experienced when an individual goes without food for brief or prolonged time periods. Hunger can take a heavy physical toll, ranging from lethargy and weakness, to stunted growth and infant mortality, to increased infections and bone disease in the elderly. The psychological consequences of going hungry in our affluent and abundant society are devastating.

Poverty is the primary cause of hunger. In fact, since 1964, the federal government has defined poverty based on the ability to purchase an adequate diet. The Office of Management and Budget defines as poor any family with an annual income less than three times the cost of a minimal diet, known as the Economy Food Plan.<sup>2</sup> To be poor, by this definition, is to be unable to afford adequate nutrition for health and growth, or to be risking hunger.<sup>3</sup> Hunger "risk" is a lack of food security experienced sporadically or chronically.

Head counts of hungry people are difficult if not impossible to make, since hunger is often hidden and sporadic. Instead, the method of using 150% of poverty-level income to estimate hunger risk has been adopted by hunger researchers and task forces around the nation. Based on the definition of poverty, this risk indicator is a meaningful and judicious way to assess needs, and to plan for preventive action.

Unfortunately, the numbers of Americans living at or near poverty have increased steadily since 1980. In 1983, 35.2 million people in this nation had fallen below the poverty level, an increase of 9 million in just four years. This is the highest number of people in poverty since statistics have been recorded.<sup>4</sup> Children are the poorest group in American society. The child poverty rate for 1985 was the highest in 18 years, with children comprising 40% of the poverty population.<sup>5</sup> Other high-risk groups living below the poverty line are: the elderly; the mentally and physically disabled; pregnant women, an increasing number of whom are teenagers (half a million in 1982); and single heads of households (78% live in poverty).





## B. HUNGER IN OAKLAND: ECONOMIC INDICATORS

### 1. Poverty

Every month, every day, thousands of low- and no-income people in Oakland face a food crisis. Families run out of food stamps, the frail elderly cannot get to a store or meal site, or individuals simply do not have the money to buy groceries. For these Oakland residents, hunger is only one of the many consequences of poverty.

Poverty-related hunger is threatening at least 100,000 Oakland residents, who make up over half (51%) of the low-income population of Alameda County. 1980 Census data, the latest local statistics available, show that almost one out of every five Oakland residents had incomes insufficient to maintain a minimum standard of living, including an adequate diet. The Census reveals 61,609 Oakland residents living below the poverty threshold (presently set at \$10,990 for a family of four, and \$5,300 for a single individual<sup>6</sup>). An additional 39,036 people live in "near" poverty (150% of poverty, or \$16,485 for a family of four). By this measure, approximately 100,600 people in Oakland, or 30% of the population, live at risk of hunger.

Census data are outdated and incomplete, however. Undocumented refugees, transients, and homeless people swell the official poverty count considerably. For example, an Emergency Services Network survey found that Oakland's <sup>7</sup>shelters turn away an average 3,000 homeless people each month.

Who are these poor? First of all, half of them are children and seniors. Almost 40% of the poor population of Oakland are under age 18, and 10% are senior citizens. Children, the elderly and pregnant women, particularly the growing numbers of pregnant teenagers, are at highest risk for the negative impacts of chronic undernutrition. Single women with dependent children are particularly burdened by poverty. Sixty-four percent of poor families in Oakland are headed by single females.<sup>8</sup> Other high-risk groups are the mentally ill, the physically disabled, chronic substance abusers, and victims of fire, household violence, and evictions.

### 2. Unemployment/Underemployment

Examining unemployment figures is another way to look at the hunger and poverty connection. Approximately 14,800 people in Oakland were officially counted as unemployed in June 1986, an estimated 8.1% of the labor force (the Alameda County figure was 5.9%).<sup>9</sup> This figure, however does not account for persons who have stopped or never began looking for work. Many critics of the current method of measuring unemployment say that the rate would be twice as high if these persons were counted, and if part-time workers and military personnel were not included.<sup>10</sup>





The decline of heavy industry and the growth of the service sector has created conditions of underemployment for many households in Oakland. Between 1979 and 1985, 110 factories in Alameda County closed, resulting in a loss of 24,000 jobs, with average yearly salaries of \$24,000.<sup>11</sup> Retail, clerical, and high-tech jobs require different skills and often are unstable and lower-paying.

Full-time employment does not guarantee an adequate income. For example, if the head of a three-person family works full-time at minimum wage (\$3.35 per hour) he or she would still earn an income 25% below the poverty line for that family. At double the pay, the income is still only 150% of poverty, placing the family at risk for hunger.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. Housing

The difficulty and cost of finding adequate housing in Oakland severely taxes what meager resources low-income persons have. Rents increased 100% between 1970 and 1980, and another 50% between 1980 and 1984. The vacancy rate is under 2%, which is considered seriously low by federal standards. The average two-bedroom apartment rent in Oakland was \$557 in July of 1985, ranging from \$422 in Elmhurst to \$685 in the Central District.<sup>13</sup>

More than 30 percent of all Oakland households paid "excessive" rents (i.e., more than 30% of total income) in 1980, and the OCD Housing Survey observes that poor persons "have been forced to divert larger portions of their incomes to housing at the expense of other household necessities, such as food, clothing and medical services" (emphasis added).<sup>14</sup> Subsidized housing in Oakland consists of 12,000 units of assisted rental public housing, and 5,500 units of Section 8, or privately-owned, assisted housing. The waiting list for either of these programs is four to five years.<sup>15</sup> Faced with the high cost of housing, families pay rent before they eat.

### 4. Public Assistance

Even though California has the second highest AFDC payment package in the country, the payment fails to bring recipients above the poverty threshold. The maximum monthly grants for a three-person family and an unrelated individual are \$734 and \$310, respectively. Approximately 54,800 persons in Oakland were on AFDC during 1984. County General Assistance (GA), a program for persons or families with assets worth less than \$100, reached an additional 2,000 persons per month. GA has only recently been increased to \$273 and \$662 per month for one and four persons, respectively.<sup>16</sup>

Food Stamps often supplement welfare grants, depending on a complex set of eligibility criteria. Food Stamp benefits reached 50,700 Oakland residents in 1984. The maximum food stamp allotment is \$80 per person per month; but in Alameda County, the





average award in April, 1985 was only \$33, which breaks down to only 37 cents per meal.<sup>17</sup>

## 5. Living Costs

The "buying power" of low-income households in Oakland is strained by the high cost of living. Even if rents were affordable, utility bills, medical costs, and other daily living expenses would still burden individuals and families struggling to live decently in Oakland. Utility bills (including telephone, gas/electric, water, and garbage) cost an estimated \$115 per month.<sup>18</sup> For those without assisted coverage, purchasing health insurance or comprehensive care starts at \$170 per month for a four-person family.<sup>19</sup> Clothing, taxes, transportation, and education are other costs which most Americans consider essential.

Overall living costs for a low-income family of four in Oakland-San Francisco were measured, for the last time, by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1981. They were ten percent higher than other cities across the nation, and they rose 93% between 1970 and 1980.<sup>20</sup>

Tragically, consumer and hunger studies have shown that food is often the first item to go when budgets are stressed.<sup>21</sup> High living costs force low-income families to make the choice between keeping a place to stay and eating, or between purchasing expensive medications and eating. The result of this choice may be sporadic hunger and/or chronic undernutrition.

## C. THE CONSEQUENCES OF HUNGER IN OAKLAND: HEALTH AND NUTRITION INDICATORS

Starvation on the scale experienced by third world nations such as Ethiopia is not the problem in Oakland, or anywhere in this country, both in terms of numbers and severity. However, skipped or inadequate meals, monotonous diets, and chronic poor food intake all have negative impacts on health, growth and nutritional status. Especially when these impacts are viewed in the context of our affluent society, they should be treated with equal concern and seriousness.

National studies have shown that long-term health consequences of chronic undernutrition include anemia, poor birth outcomes, impaired growth in children, increased susceptibility to infections, and bone disease in older women. Children who come to school hungry have exhibited irritability, apathy, and limited attention spans, which disrupt the learning process, according to a recent report.<sup>22</sup>

Surveys and reports since 1978 have documented hunger and food scarcity in Oakland and Alameda County. Some of the key findings are as follows:





o The Infant Mortality Rate among Black women in parts of Oakland is still among the highest in the country. In 1984, this rate was 17.5 deaths per 1000 live births, compared to a state average of 9.4, and a rate of 7.9 among low-risk women in the county.<sup>23</sup> Poor maternal nutrition is one of the primary risk factors for infant death.

o Nutrition assessments of 86 emergency food recipients in the County in 1984-85 showed clear dietary inadequacy. Three-quarters of the group consumed less than 1200 calories per day, and more than half failed to consume food from more than one food group.<sup>24</sup>

o Emergency food providers, surveyed in 1982 and again in 1986, are experiencing an overwhelming increase in requests for emergency assistance, some by as much as 700%.<sup>25</sup>

o Access to wholesome, inexpensive food is a severe problem in parts of the City. A three-square mile area of West Oakland has been virtually deserted by low-cost chain supermarkets, forcing those who can least afford it to pay up to 40% more for food at small "Mom and Pop" or convenience stores.<sup>26</sup>

o Last summer, Bread for the World, a national hunger advocacy group, included Alameda County in a survey which documented how Federal Food Assistance programs are not meeting the need, in both the County and the City.<sup>27</sup> Budget cuts have tightened eligibility, created new and threatening regulations, and lowered benefit levels, in the Food Stamp, School Lunch, Senior Meals, and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) programs. For example, 22,800 potentially eligible women, infants and children at risk for hunger are not getting WIC benefits in Alameda County because of these constraints.<sup>28</sup>

#### **D. EMERGENCY FEEDING PROGRAMS: STRUGGLING TO MEET THE NEED**

A major consequence of the growing problem of hunger in Oakland has been the increased pressure on private, non-profit organizations to provide more emergency food and services to the needy. How well are emergency food providers meeting the need for emergency food in Alameda County and Oakland in particular? The comparisons in Table 1, while crude, put the situation into some perspective.





**TABLE 1: COUNTY-BY-COUNTY COMPARISON OF EMERGENCY FOOD SERVICES**

COUNTY	POVERTY (number living below 150% of poverty, 1980)	FOOD MOVED IN 1985* (millions of pounds)	POUNDS PER PERSON** (per year)
Santa Clara	165,000	7.0	42.4
Contra Costa	65,000	2.7	41.5
Marin	26,000	1.0	38.5
San Francisco	160,000	3.2	20.0
ALAMEDA	200,000	2.8	14.0

\* Does not include commodities. Figures provided by food banks, and in Alameda County, the principal food distributors.

\*\* "Pounds per person" is a rough indicator used for a comparison purposes only. It does not mean that each person is actually receiving the poundage shown.

The criteria used in Table 1 are only an approximate way to assess unmet emergency food need. Not every poor or near-poor person is necessarily hungry, and emergency food is not the only way counties deal with the hunger problem.

More evidence of an emergency food shortage is found in the results of a recent preliminary needs survey of 77 emergency providers, 48 of whom are located in Oakland. The survey, which was conducted by the County Food Bank, indicates that there is a significant unmet need for emergency food. The Oakland providers surveyed reported serving an average of 25,000 persons monthly, and turning away an average of 3,000 people (11%). Many groups also restrict the number of times an individual can receive food in a given period. The study concludes that many people are not being served because of an inadequate supply of food.<sup>29</sup>

In spite of the difficulty in obtaining "hard" comparative measures, the above analysis demonstrates that Alameda County has the highest need in the Bay Area, and that food is not moving through the county at the levels seen in other counties.

Hunger in Oakland, caused by poverty, is no longer an emergency. Instead, it has become a chronic reality, which threatens our most valuable resource: a healthy and happy population able to contribute to community growth and adapt to our changing city economy.



## II. EMERGENCY FOOD PROVISION IN OAKLAND

Oakland's emergency food provision system operates on two levels: 1) A group of seven "umbrella", or larger food distribution agencies, and 2) hundreds of smaller direct-service food providers operating in the neighborhoods. To clarify terms and establish a working vocabulary, a generic emergency food "glossary" is provided below.

### Emergency Food Glossary<sup>30</sup>

**Brown Bag:** A senior program, run by seniors, which involves collecting donated and surplus food at a central warehouse, and redistributing the food in bags at neighborhood sites. County Brown Bag programs vary in size and organization: some are independent operations, some are run by county food banks.

**Food Bank:** A warehouse of donated food product. Government surplus, retail store salvage (dented or damaged packages, etc.), and bulk donations of processed foods and produce, are sorted, stored, and distributed to participating agencies, not individuals.

**Food Pantry:** Located at neighborhood agencies or church sites, pantries stock basic food items and distribute boxes of food staples to individuals or families in need.

**Food Gleaning:** The retrieval of nutritious food items that would otherwise be wasted or dumped. Sources include restaurants, bakeries, retail stores, and commercial or backyard orchards or fields.

**Shelter:** Temporary living accommodations are provided to homeless individuals and families. Special groups are usually served separately, such as single men, and women and children. Meals are provided at shelters, usually only to residents.

**Soup Kitchen:** Simple meals, usually hot, are provided to clients on a walk-in basis. Hour and frequency of meals varies with each site.

**Surplus Commodities:** Government distribution of the surplus products of the farm industry includes cheese, butter, honey, powdered milk, corn and wheat flour, and sometimes rice, beans, raisins, and canned meat. This U.S. Department of Agriculture program is administered in California by the State Department of Education, Office of Food Distribution.

**Second Harvest:** The nationwide clearinghouse and conduit for large donations from the food processing and retailing industry. Second Harvest, a non-profit corporation located in Chicago, requires member food banks to conform to industry standards in safety, handling, storage, tracking, and transporting of food.





## **A. CITY-WIDE FOOD DISTRIBUTORS**

Alameda County was one of the last urban areas west of the Mississippi to form a county-wide food bank. Other counties in the Bay Area have had centralized food banks operating for some time, some as far back as 1975.

Because of this historical situation, several large-scale emergency food providers have begun and expanded, each in their own unique way, to meet the urgent need. Although all of these groups share a common goal of feeding the hungry, each has a different history and set of administrative constraints.

To compare them, or to attempt to come up with an overall measure of food service or volume, is fraught with difficulties. Some providers keep accurate records of the poundage they handle on a monthly basis, some count persons served, or meals served, some calculate the dollar value of the food moved, and some do not keep more than the most rudimentary records. No standard comparative measure exists.

Table 2, which appears at the end of this section, provides brief profiles of each organization, to give the reader a qualitative "taste" of what these groups do in the community. The seven larger groups profiled are agencies which 1) consistently serve large client populations (more than 300 per week); 2) also serve other agencies instead of (or as well as) directly feeding clients (hence the term "umbrella"); and, 3) with some exceptions, operate on a county-wide basis. The information in these profiles was obtained from the groups themselves, and was not audited or verified.

## **B. NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED FOOD PROVIDERS**

Hungry people in Oakland's neighborhoods are also relying on smaller food providers for emergency groceries, hot meals, and monthly commodities. Most of these food providers are church-sponsored. Some are well-established and operated by paid professional staff. Some are open sporadically and run entirely by volunteers with little experience in recordkeeping, food handling, etc. A complete and accurate listing of every emergency provider in Oakland does not exist, but preliminary research estimates that at least 150 groups are serving low-income people in Oakland.

Basically, there are two types of small food sites. First, the meal sites, or soup kitchens. Meals are served daily by five groups in the city, to a total average of 1650 persons per day, in kitchens located in or near the downtown area. Five other groups, mostly churches, serve lunches or suppers to local residents once per week. The City's five shelters feed residents only, except for the Salvation Army. Other churches reported making sandwiches on weekends if volunteer labor permits. Sites





vary in sophistication from the fully equipped industrial feeding program of St. Vincent de Paul, to meals prepared by volunteers in home or church kitchens.

Food pantries are small operations where food is collected, stored, and parcelled out to needy families either on a weekly schedule, or when assistance is requested. There are approximately 65-70 known pantries in Oakland; that is, the citywide agencies have records of these sites as participating agencies or as commodity programs, or both. However, an unknown number operate small pantries independent of any outside food resources, thus being hard to locate. Food pantries also vary in size and style, ranging from small church closets serving families sporadically requesting emergency assistance, to weekly food and distribution operations serving 200-300 people.



**TABLE 2: CITY-WIDE FOOD PROVIDERS - AGENCY PROFILES**

**1. Alameda County Emergency Food Coalition 6325 Camden, Oakland**

Description: Buys non-perishable food items at wholesale rate, then distributes food to 13 county sites, 6 in Oakland. Food is then distributed to persons referred to sites by County Social Services Agency. Established in 1975, with a 7-member Board of Directors. Moved 517,624 pounds of food, serving 52,000 people in 1985.

**FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT:** No warehouse; food is distributed directly to Coalition sites by wholesaler.

**BUDGET AND PERSONNEL:** \$317,929 FY 1987 budget (majority County funding); 1.5 full-time-equivalent employees.

**PROGRAMS:** 1) Food purchase and distribution program described above. 2) Distributes infant formula donated by Ross Labs. 2,780 infants served since 1980. 3) Staff active in establishment and coordination of other major food programs in Oakland, including Food Bank, Project HOPE, and Food Voucher Program.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Food box make-up is determined with consultation by Nutritionist from Alameda County Health Services Agency to assure a balanced, three-day supply for recipients. County referral system necessitates total accountability.

**2. Alameda County Food Bank 2287 Poplar St. Oakland 94607**

**DESCRIPTION:** Solicits donated and surplus food, then distributes to other agencies. An independent non-profit since December, 1985. Fifteen-member Board of Directors, with geographic area representation. Moved 2.7 million pounds of food in first seven months (includes 2.1 million pounds of USDA surplus commodities). Approximately 60% of food goes to Oakland providers.

**FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT:** 20,000 square foot warehouse, 1 truck, lease another, 2 forklifts, walk-in freezer and refrigerator.

**BUDGET AND PERSONNEL:** \$300,000 annual budget (equal parts county, federal, and private/foundation funding); 5 full time employees.

**PROGRAMS:** 1) 63 participating agencies pick-up food approximately once per week, serving roughly 30,000 people each month. Shared maintenance fee \$.10 per pound, except for free bread and produce. 2) 75 surplus commodity sites serve an estimated 70,000 people per month.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Contracted to distribute federal Surplus Commodities by State Department of Education. Recognized as "Affiliate Food





Bank" by Second Harvest. Plans to move 1 million pounds of donated foods, and over 4 million pounds of commodities, in FY 1986-87.

### **3. Central East Oakland Food Pantry 949 71st Avenue, Oakland**

**DESCRIPTION:** Solicits donated food, then distributes to individuals and some member agencies. Operating since 1982; a program of Union Baptist Church and governed by that body. Moves approximately 500,000 pounds of food per year, 95% to Oakland residents. Food sources include the Food Bank (commodities in particular), Project Volunteer, and East Bay Brown Bag.

**FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT:** small storage facility, limited cold storage. 1 van.

**BUDGET AND PERSONNEL:** Supported by church donations and fundraising, no formal operating budget. Staffed entirely by volunteers.

**PROGRAMS:** 1) Distributes 250-300 emergency bags weekly, at approximately 30-40 sites, as well as deliveries to shut-ins.  
2) Clothing collection and distribution program.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** All-volunteer effort in high-need area.

### **4. Mercy Brown Bag Program (Formerly East Bay Brown Bag) 3431 Foothill Boulevard, Oakland**

**DESCRIPTION:** Solicits donated and surplus food, which is then distributed by volunteers weekly from five sites, to low-income elderly, including the home-bound. After the food is distributed, surplus food is shared with several other Alameda County food programs. In operation since 1982; a program of Mercy Retirement and Care Center, governed by that 15-member Board of Directors. Moved 546,223 pounds of food in 1985.

**FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT:** 2,500 square-foot storage area; 2 trucks, 1 van.

**BUDGET AND PERSONNEL:** 1985 budget: approximately \$77,000 (funds from California Department on Aging; corporate and foundation grants, individual donations, and voluntary membership fee.) 2.5 full-time employees.

**PROGRAMS:** 1) 5 Brown Bag sites serve 450 low-income elderly per week; 2) 25-30 Participating Agencies pick up food sporadically; 3) Nutrition and consumer education program for seniors, and seasonal "gleaning" trips to orchards for fresh produce harvests.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** About 150 seniors volunteer monthly; ongoing education and self-help program for low-income seniors.





**5. Project Volunteer 880 81st Avenue, Oakland 94610**

**DESCRIPTION:** Solicits donated and surplus food, then distributes to member agencies. Established in 1976; a charity program of the Unification Church, governed by that organization. Moved approximately 1.5 million pounds in 1985, 95% to Oakland (highly seasonal volume, mostly summer produce).

**FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT:** 10,000 sq. ft. warehouse/office space; 4 new trucks, 1 van. Walk-in freezer and refrigerator.

**BUDGET AND PERSONNEL:** Approximately \$75,000 in yearly church support and fundraising donations. Staffed by 4-5 full-time church member-volunteers.

**PROGRAMS:** 1) serves approximately 60 groups per month, who reach an average of 2,500 families weekly. Shared maintenance fee averages \$.035 per pound.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Warehouse located in high-need area; fresh produce available in summer; large volunteer force; well-established food donor base.

**6. Salvation Army Center for Social Services 810 Clay, Oakland**

**DESCRIPTION:** A 40-bed shelter facility, with a two-meal program serving an average of 300 per day. Staffed and run by employees of the Salvation Army, governed by Division Board. Food sources include Food Bank, USDA commodities, and surplus from central Salvation Army warehouse in Modesto.

**FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT:** Fully-equipped kitchen and dining room, walk-in freezer and refrigerator, 1 van.

**BUDGET AND PERSONNEL:** Operating expenses for multipurpose facility come from county revenue-sharing, United Way, Salvation Army, and individual donations. 16 full-time employees (4 in foodservice); 14 workfare slots.

**PROGRAMS:** 1) Free meals available at 11 AM and 3:30 PM Monday through Friday. 2) Shelter to women and children, with separate meals. 3) Emergency counseling and assistance available at site.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Facility provides comprehensive services to persons in need, both families and single transients.



## **7. Society of St. Vincent de Paul**

Dining Room: 675 23rd St. Oakland; Alameda County District Council: 9235 San Leandro St. Oakland

**DESCRIPTION:** Coordinated by the County District Council, the Society feeds the hungry in three major ways: 1) Operation of a large dining facility in downtown Oakland, 2) Provision of donated food to 50 Parish Conferences, for use in church food pantries, and 3) Distribution of occasional excess food to other pantries and missions in the East Bay. The County District Council is governed by a 21-member Board of Trustees.

**FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT:** Fully equipped kitchen and dining room with 6 walk-in freezers and refrigerators. Excess food beyond the needs and storage capacity of the Dining Room are stored at the San Leandro St. warehouse (15,000 square feet) and walk-in freezer. 2 trucks, 1 van.

**BUDGET AND PERSONNEL:** Yearly operating budget of approximately \$275,000 supports entire program, coming entirely from church, business, and private donations, and supported by sales in eight county Thrift Stores. 150 staff, some volunteer, some salaried.

**PROGRAMS:** 1) Largest dining facility in Oakland, open every day for lunch. 2) 52 member conferences operate food pantries of various sizes and types throughout the County.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Completely privately funded, many volunteers, some with staff positions of responsibility.





### III. PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

#### A. Hunger is a serious problem in Oakland.

Using poverty as an indicator, over 100,000 people in Oakland risk food scarcity and hunger. (See Part I for details.) The health and human consequences of hunger--weakness and lethargy, infant mortality, stunted growth, chronic malnutrition, and increased mental stress--are eroding Oakland's present and future community.

Public assistance programs are reaching part of the at-risk population, but by no means all of it, and benefits often do not fully cover the costs of living in this area. The increased service demand reported by emergency providers suggests that low-income families are more and more relying on private efforts to meet their food needs, either sporadically or at regular monthly intervals.

#### B. More food is needed.

How are private food providers meeting this challenge? Section II of this report describes the creative and energetic activities of both large and small organizations serving the hungry. A standard measure for the total food volume moving through Oakland has yet to be devised. However, using very rough poundage estimates such as those in Table 1, Section I of this report, data from 1985 indicate that the volume of emergency food flowing through Alameda County, and thus Oakland, was substantially lower than that of other Bay Area counties.

Both large and small providers would benefit from a stronger "donor base", or pool of food processors, retailers and restaurants, who regularly donate their surplus or salvage product to local sites. Second Harvest, the national food bank clearinghouse, allocates a proportion of its donations to the County Food Bank, which in turn distributes the food to participating agencies. However, both large and small providers alike cannot rely on Second Harvest for all donated food. Local food businesses and concerned individuals need to learn about the hunger problem and the food service network already in place, so that they will be motivated to donate to local providers.

#### C. Emergency food providers need more resources to support their operations.

In general, all providers, both large and small, are experiencing similar problems. Every provider without exception reported that money is needed. Rents, utility bills, and purchased food are costs that restrict better service and/or expansion. Several programs are severely threatened by the recent elimination of revenue-sharing funds, which they rely on for existence. Cuts to Community Service Block Grants have further



limited public financial assistance. Although volunteer labor is the backbone of emergency food provision, larger sites and umbrella sites have an urgent need for paid personnel to keep accurate records, maintain food safety, coordinate and train volunteers, and generally maintain a quality program. Food storage, preparation, and moving equipment, such as freezers, refrigerators, trucks, forklifts, shelving, stoves, etc., are also being sought by providers to make their work more efficient and safe.

#### **D. Providers want more information and skills training.**

All providers expressed needs for different kinds of information. Small providers need better listings of emergency food sites in the City, so that they can make referrals when they need to. Technical skills need strengthening--in recordkeeping, inventory, food storage, and nutrition planning--because accurate recordkeeping, fiscal accountability, and product safety are usually requirements for participation in larger food programs. Many church and community groups expressed a need for help in fundraising, including grantsmanship, events, and appeals.

#### **E. Greater coordination could improve delivery of food to the hungry.**

Stronger communication and cooperation, both between the large providers and among the many small neighborhood groups, is essential to the improvement of the food situation in Oakland. Several of the large providers are already sharing perishable food resources, storage space, and even funding. There is great potential for other types of sharing: transportation, management expertise, educational resources, and computer power are only some examples.

On the neighborhood level, providers must initiate closer working relationships in order to better serve needs. To participate in publicly-funded umbrella programs (such as the surplus commodities network), small providers must now prove that they are not duplicating services, and must demonstrate their ability to run a consistent and accountable program. Underserved areas must be pinpointed using objective criteria, and then given priority for development. Providers operating in areas where services may be competing should be encouraged to cooperate and/or modify the type of assistance offered.





#### IV. CONCLUSION

Hunger in Oakland is no longer an emergency, but a chronic threat to any individual or family living in poverty. The "emergency" food system that has evolved to meet some of the needs of Oakland's hungry is growing and changing rapidly. In general, these programs are having to make a transition: from their origins as ad hoc, or crisis-oriented efforts, they are becoming institutionalized.

For the many food providers who have been running on volunteer staff and "shoestring" budgets, this institutionalization has caused administrative and financial burdens which often prove excessive. These providers, who are able to assist thousands of people every month, are in great need of assistance themselves. They need more food, more money, more information and more skills training. With these resources, they will be better equipped to serve the unmet need.

Assuredly, a concerted and creative community effort can uncover and increase financial and educational assistance, as well as food supplies, all of which are badly needed to support improvement and expansion of emergency food service in Oakland. These resources must be shared openly and equitably.

More documentation and analysis would be necessary before an accurate estimate can be made of Oakland's unmet emergency food needs. However, even without an expensive statistical study, it is obvious that the need is great, and that it is not going to go away. Both the emergency food providers and the people they serve are a precious community resource, which must be protected and nurtured.



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# CITY OF OAKLAND

## Interoffice Letter

To: Office of the City Manager Attention: Henry L. Gardner Date: October 28, 1986

From: Office of Community Development

Subject: Report on Hunger in Oakland and  
Oakland's Emergency Food Services

The attached report on "Hunger in Oakland" describes the extent of hunger in Oakland and the various emergency food services available for Oakland's citizens. The report was researched by the Emergency Food Coordinators in the Office of Community Development.

The report reveals that it is extremely difficult to measure the number of people in Oakland who cannot afford an adequate diet for themselves or their families. Conceptually, it seems simple to estimate the number of hungry people in Oakland (based on income statistics) and subtract the number of people being served by governmental programs (such as welfare and food stamps), and the various emergency food providers in Oakland. The balance would be the estimate of the number of hungry people who need additional assistance. However, any estimate that was made would be questionable based on differing definitions of hunger; on the different methods used to count the number of people served by emergency food providers; and whether existing governmental programs (e.g., welfare and food stamps) are adequately meeting the needs of the hungry. The report does explain a method of defining "hunger risk" which is a measure used by groups across the nation.

While there may be questions about the definition of hunger or the methods used to calculate the extent of hunger, it is possible to compare services in Alameda County with those in other Bay Area counties by using the common definition of "hunger risk." (People are at "risk of hunger" if their incomes are below 150% of the poverty income level.) Using this definition, it is very clear that Alameda County has the lowest amount of emergency food available (per person below 150% of the poverty level) of any of the five Bay Area counties.

To improve the emergency food situation in Oakland the Emergency Food Coordinators are working on the following services:

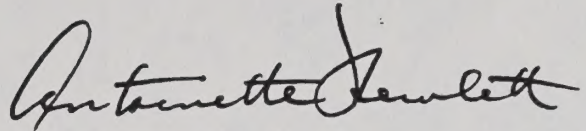
1. Preparing a technical resource manual for emergency food providers.
2. Coordinating a technical assistance workshop for emergency food providers.
3. Providing direct technical assistance to specific emergency food providers, including fundraising events and food drives.
4. Compiling a list of all emergency food providers in Oakland and preparing a geographical analysis to identify areas in need of emergency food services.
5. Conducting monthly meetings with the major emergency food providers to facilitate the coordination of services in Oakland.





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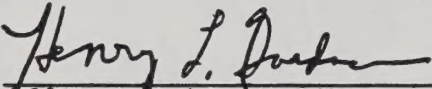
In general, it appears that emergency food services in Oakland are improving, but they are far behind the rest of the Bay Area. In early 1987, we will provide a status report on the activities of the Emergency Food Coordination effort listed above.



ANTOINETTE HEWLETT  
Director

Attachment

APPROVED FOR FORWARDING  
TO THE CITY COUNCIL:

  
Office of the City Manager





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